



Notes from LEAD Editor

Employee empowerment is key to improving organizational success and performance. One way to empower the workforce is by developing self-directed work teams. The success of self-directed work teams requires the organization's commitment and the willingness to allow greater flexibility in decision-making. The articles in this month's LEAD illustrate team dynamics and how to create successful self-directed work teams.

TEAM DYNAMICS

LEAD Article

"A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and common approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."

Understanding team dynamics has the potential to boost organizational performance and success. Here are the dynamics of an effective team:

Small Number - A small number is anywhere from 2 to 20 members. Any number between 5 and 9 is manageable and usually optimal.

Complementary Skills - The real benefits of synergy are realized when the team is diverse and various ideas and multiple skills are combined.

Common Purpose - This is the driving force of a team. The team starts with the organization's mission statement, and then develops its own purpose. This purpose must be meaningful and must have ownership by everyone, as individuals and as a group.

Performance Goals - A team is an acting, moving, energizing force. Specific performance goals are established, tracked, met and evaluated on an ongoing basis. This progression of successful outcomes establishes trust and credibility among team members, and fuels the team to handle greater challenges.

Common Approach - Team members must agree how they will work together. Teams develop their own set of guidelines that outline the expected responsibilities of members.

Mutually Accountable - This is the aspect of teamwork that is usually the last to develop. It's owning and sharing the team's outcome. This develops when the group experiences successes with its Common Purpose, Performance Goals and Common Approach, while building a sense of commitment and trust among members.

-Adapted from "Self-Directed Teams" by Mark Chatfield, Interaction Research Institute, VA

SELF-DIRECTED WORK TEAMS

A self-directed work team (SDWT) is a group of employees working together with a common purpose. The team relies on effective communication and cooperation among each other. The team's success requires commitment, skill development, and support from the organization. The basic steps necessary to implement a SDWT are:

Develop a Shared Vision - A meaningful mission statement is what promotes a common language and direction for the team and organization.

Empower the Work Force - Empowerment is the key to self-directed teams and a basic rule for successful work teams.

Maintain a Supportive Culture - Top management and key stakeholders must be actively supportive. Actions must be aligned with this commitment.

Establish the Initial Boundaries - Are there limits that the team should know about? Work rules? Company policies? Boundaries? Interactions with other teams or departments?

Skill Development - A key factor to the success of a team is ongoing training. The best training happens right before the skills and knowledge must be put to use. Experienced team practitioners site that a lack of practical and timely training is the greatest block to team success.

-Adapted from "Self-Directed Teams" by Mark Chatfield, Interaction Research Institute, VA





WHAT ARE SELF-DIRECTED WORK TEAMS?

Successful self-directed work teams (SDWT) require a change in the traditional organizational structure. A SDWT is a small number of employees brought together to cooperatively work on a specific project or goal with decision-making abilities. When developing a SDWT remember these simple ideas:

- 1** The goal of SDWT is to have employees from all levels in the organization be part of the decision-making process while improving productivity and performance. This is accomplished by teams of employees sharing the responsibility for a particular service or project, while utilizing a variety of their skills. SDWT involve a collective effort from those who are most closely involved with the product or service. Clear lines of communication are key during team interactions and most importantly during goal development.
- 2** SDWT need an outside coach, a person who is in charge with transferring management responsibilities to the team; providing the team with training and technical resources; facilitating team development and mediating conflicts; and encouraging teams. Teams are successful if there are good verbal and written communication, a high degree of interpersonal trust and authority residing in the team for decision-making.
- 3** Some problems that SDWT face are: performance expectations being set too low or too high for team members; goals too frequently changed, lack central themes or unifying direction, or not linked to the strategic needs of the organization; culture of organization continues to encourage individual effort, thereby hindering a team's ability to buy into the concept of SDWT.

Self-Directed Work Teams is a revolutionary organizational concept. It places responsibilities with employees, and thereby permits greater flexibility in decision-making within all levels of the organization.

-Adapted from "What Are Self-Directed Work Teams?" by R. Cox, Site MGED 1999

BUILDING EMPOWERED TEAMS

Encouraging employees to think independently at work is an ever-pressing issue. Many employees have become conditioned to be reliant upon their supervisors to solve problems and make decisions for them. Because of this, it is hard for employees to solve problems as a team. Therefore, to build team empowerment the organization needs empowered employees and cooperation among staff.

You can build cooperation among employees by arranging workflows so groups of employees share ownership and accountability for measurable results. Your goal is to provide small groups of employees with the resources and information they need to manage their own jobs, complete a project, and satisfy customers. Teams can be thought of as a business within the business. If employees do not share accountability for measurable results, they will have no reason to work together.

Once you have developed a system that allows people to think independently and build shared ownership and accountability, people will begin behaving like a team, even without your encouragement. It will naturally make sense to them.

-Adapted from Center for the Study of Work Teams Newsletter, Summer 1999, Issue 30

COMPONENTS OF SELF-DIRECTED TEAMS

Self-directed teams are an integral part of the organization because they can improve the overall success in the organization.

Self-directed teams need to manage every aspect of their activities, from day-to-day operations to long-term goals. This also includes establishing work schedules, assigning specific assignments, and setting goals.

Team members need to share authority and be held mutually accountable for team success or failure – teams take responsibility as a group and not as individuals.

Self-directed work teams need clear lines of communication between all team members – this involves effective listening and communicating. Common understanding and purpose cannot arise in the group without communication. Teams need to continually engage in group discussions.

The organization needs to recognize the difficulties in changing the corporate culture – teams must be continually supported. It is important to clarify the team's role within the company.

Pick team members with a variety of complementary skills. Picking team

members who have a variety of skills will lead to a more diverse and successful team. Also, remember team selection is not limited to those who already have a specific set of skills because teamwork, communication, and management skills can be taught.

Lastly, where does the employees' manager or supervisor fit into the process? Outside of the team there needs to be a leader, someone who has little interaction with the team. It is the role of the leader to act as a coach and a champion for the team.

-Adapted from "Self-Directed Work Teams," University of Denver, www.du.edu

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